

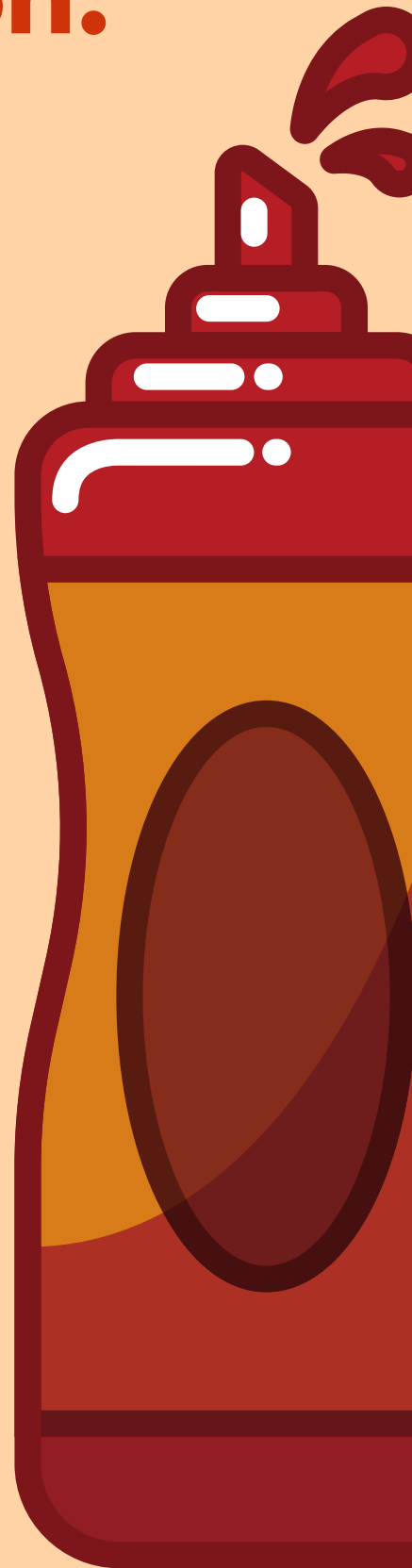
Self Regulation:

THE SECRET SAUCE

Why Self-Regulation?

Secret sauce with your fries takes your meal to a whole new level. Self-regulation is also essential for any college student looking to level up their productivity. In a nutshell, self-regulation involves our abilities to monitor and regulate our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to move ourselves toward important goals. It relates to some of the most important skills that successful students utilize to be productive and accomplish important tasks.

Self-regulation involves a number of facets including the abilities to: initiate behavior, persist with thoughts and behavior in pursuit of a goal, resist and inhibit thoughts, desires, impulses and behavior that are inconsistent with one's goals, regulate one's emotions in pursuit of goals and manage the shifting of one's focus from one task to another when necessary. (Vohs & Baumeister, 2016).



Strength Theory of Self-Control

Research shows that our ability to self-regulate is a **finite energy resource**. It is used up as we engage in activities that require mental or physical energy over the course of a day. **Self-regulatory failure** occurs when we become depleted by mental tasks, decision making, social demands, hunger, physical exhaustion, and other stressors.

It is **replenished** when we rest and recover and can be renewed through certain activities. Like a **muscle**, self-regulation ability increases in capacity and strength over time when exercised. Essentially, self-regulation involves “reducing the **frequency** and **intensity** of strong impulses by managing stress-load and recovery” (Shanker, 2016).

Below are some strategies to help effectively conserve, utilize and renew daily and long-term self-regulation ability:



1

Care for Daily Physical Needs

We all have recurring physical needs for **sleep, food, water, exercise**, etc. When not met, we often feel depleted and we are not in an optimal state physically, cognitively, or emotionally to self-regulate well.

- a. Establish a sleep schedule in which you:
Get sufficient quality sleep (7-9 hours) each night and go to bed and wake each day at roughly the same time.
- b. Plan for healthy meals, snacks and water to meet your needs for nutrients, energy and hydration.
- c. Participate in regular physical activity to support physical and mental health and help manage stress.



2

Build Routines and Develop Effective Habits

Habits that are consistent with your goals are helpful because they require less energy than it does to make conscious decisions. This means you can make good choices even when you would not otherwise have the energy (self-regulation).

- a. You can help build routines by planning regularly, attaching your effective goal-pursuit behaviors to “**anchors**” in your day. Anchors are recurring activities that already occur regularly in your day. By attaching habits to your routine (e.g., your morning/bedtime routine) you make it easier to establish and automate new patterns of behavior that will support your goal pursuits.



3

Make Plans in Advance

Mental effort, such as decision making, depletes self-regulation. Having a plan saves you from making important goal pursuit decisions throughout the day (e.g., what time will I get up, what will I study and for how long?) Planning in advance helps us retain more energy for important tasks and reduces the chances of getting off task during the day.

- a. Your plan should include **details** and **specifics** (What? When? Where? Goals? Etc.) Plans are most effective when they have a specific time and place, and an end goal.





4

Utilize Implementation Plans

Implementation plans are plans that anticipate the typical obstacles that will get in the way of you accomplishing your task or goal. They stipulate in advance, specific actions you will take if/when you encounter those obstacles, to overcome them.

- a. For example, if you get distracted by your phone while studying, you might plan to turn your phone off when you begin studying and only allow yourself to check it at designated times, or as a reward after you have completed certain tasks, etc.



5

Shape Your Environment

Create an environment that is consistent with, and supports, your goal pursuits.

- a. As part of this, establish positive aspects of your environment that help you effectively pursue your goals (e.g., a quiet and comfortable study space with few distractions, etc.)
- b. Remove aspects of your environment that interfere or pull you away from effectively pursuing your goals (e.g. studying on campus).
-Research has demonstrated that “participants were most successful at resisting temptations when they removed the tempting stimulus or limited their exposure to it”. (Wood, 2016. p. 98)



6

Replenish Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is depleted as we go throughout the day. There are many things you can do each day to ensure the most energy possible to self-regulate effectively and to restore this energy as it is depleted.

- a. Plan and prepare to care for your regular recurring needs throughout the day
- b. Schedule your work throughout the day such that you have short (30-60 min) periods of focused productivity followed by a rejuvenating break.
- c. Identify break activities that actually rejuvenate you and prepare you to be productive again. Many of the activities we engage in (e.g., surfing the internet, video games) don't actually rejuvenate us! Try taking a short walk outside, having a talk with a friend, taking a 15 minute nap, listening to relaxing music, stretching, etc.)



7

Develop Self-Awareness

Become a student of yourself and become self aware.

- a. Develop awareness of times and places during the day where you are alert and capable of being productive. Identify common distractions, obstacles, and temptations that undermine your productivity and interfere with your goals.
- b. Use this awareness to work effectively towards your goals by shaping your environment with strategies such as planning to utilize times when you are at your best for your most important tasks, creating spaces and times where you can be productive, avoiding or removing obstacles from your environment that interfere with your goal pursuits, etc.



**MAYO PRODUCTIVITY EFFORTS BE BLESSED SO YOU CAN
KETCHUP TO YOUR GOALS!**



References:

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